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Title: The Psychology of Stereotypes: When the Positive Becomes Negative and the Negative Positive

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Abstract. This article describes some of the positive and negative features of positive and negative stereotypes.

There is a significant amount of social sciences research on how stereotypes are developed and maintained. A large amount of related research concerns the noxious effects of negative stereotypes-- i.e., belief systems about a socially constructed group of people that are generally apperceived as unflattering. The least amount of related research appears to be on the positive effects of negative stereotypes and the negative effects of positive stereotypes.

How can negative stereotypes have positive effects? In some individuals, the negative can beget a burning desire to succeed against all odds. The negative--even if negative--can serve as a stable foundation of self-identity. The negative pertaining to a group can discourage a successful individual of that group from resting on individual laurels and encourage constructive actions benefiting the group as a whole. The negative stereotype may help foster compassion and empathy for underdogs everywhere. Negative stereotypes when promulgated widely throughout a nation-state may help subvert themselves and related supporting foundations through social comparison processes with the many internal contradictions of socially constructed fact confronting themselves.

How can positive stereotypes have negative effects? Individuals who perceive that they don't measure up to the positive may suffer significant anxiety and depression regardless of the unreasonableness of the positive. As with any stereotype, the positive helps cheat the individual out of a significant sense of uniqueness and individuality. As with any stereotype, those outside the stereotyped group who perceive their own comparative uniqueness will often err in the nature and quality of social judgements towards the stereotyped group.

It seems too facile to support without reservation the notion that--if possible--all stereotypes should be jettisoned as outmoded and unnecessary human detritus. Some researchers may posit stereotypes' adaptive utility related to projective defenses, others to cognitive-affective complexes of self-development and self-maintenance. But one stereotype that needs to go is that all stereotypes need to go. (See Augoustinos, M., & Walker, I. (1998). The construction of stereotypes within social psychology: From social cognition to ideology. *Theory and Psychology*, 8, 629-652; Karasawa, M. (1998). Eliminating national stereotypes: Direct versus indirect disconfirmation of beliefs in covariation. *Japanese Psychological Research*, 40, 61-73; Kurcz, I. (1998). Stereotype change: Its mechanisms and limits. *Studia Psychologica*, 40, 33-46; Maass, A., Montalcini, F., & Biciotti, E. (1998). On the (dis)confirmability of stereotypic attributes. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 28, 383-402; Smith, D. (November 21, 1998). Sander Gilman: How even 'good' stereotypes can be bad. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Spencer, S.J., et al. (1998). Automatic activation of stereotypes: The role of self-image threat. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 24, 1139-1152.) (Keywords: Group, Self, Stereotypes.)